

# A Short History of Negro Public Higher Education In West Virginia, 1890-1965

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THE establishment of separate, publicly supported institutions for the higher education of black Americans has, with few exceptions, been limited to the Southern and Border states. In 1860, approximately 90 per cent of the Negroes in the United States resided in the South. Most were slaves who received little or no formal education. By and large, the Southern states had not developed a system of free public schools. The Reconstruction governments provided for the establishment of public school systems; the return to power of the Democratic party insured that these schools would be segregated. The operation of a separate system of public education for blacks necessitated the establishment of institutions for the training of Negro teachers. This served to further perpetuate the system by setting in motion a chain of supply and demand in which the availability of teaching positions drew students to qualify for the positions. Seventeen historically Negro public colleges were founded prior to 1890. The Second Morrill Act in 1890 provided additional incentive for the development of institutions devoted to the higher education of blacks. During the decade preceding the turn of the century, a Negro land grant college was established or designated in each of the seventeen Southern and Border states.<sup>1</sup>

The West Virginia Constitution of 1872, which was adopted subsequent to the transition of power from the Radical Republicans to the Democratic party, provided that "white and colored persons shall not be taught in the same school."<sup>2</sup> Black students were thereby prohibited from attending the West Virginia University and the state normal schools. The revised school law of 1873 confirmed segregation and provided for the establishment of free primary schools for

<sup>1</sup> Frank Brown and Frank A. Dismore, *Between Two Worlds: A Profile of Negro Higher Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), 27-28. A land grant college could be provided for in one of three ways: creating a new institution, designating an existing public institution as a land grant college, or designating a private institution as the land grant college for the state.

<sup>2</sup> W. Va. Constitution, 1872, art. 12, sec. 4.

the education of Negro children.<sup>3</sup> In that blacks were excluded from the state normals, the state beginning in 1881 provided a subsidy to Storer College, a private normal school for Negroes at Harper's Ferry.<sup>4</sup> Although the Constitution of 1872 directed that "no appropriation shall be made to any state normal school, or branch thereof, except to those already established and in operation or now chartered," the use of public funds to subsidize Storer College was not in violation of the provision because Storer was a private institution.<sup>5</sup>

In March of 1891, the state legislature accepted the provisions of the Second Morrill Act. An attempt to have Storer College designated as the land grant institution for the state was rejected. Rather, a new institution, the West Virginia Colored Institute, was to be located in Kanawha County, near Charleston. A total of \$10,000 was provided for the purchase of land and construction of a building. A separate institution was necessary in order that the West Virginia University might receive an annual Morrill Fund appropriation while continuing to exclude blacks as was required by the state constitution. The government of the institute was vested in a five member board of regents which was independent of both the university regents and the normal school regents. The total number of school age youth at this time was approximately 262,000 of which 12,000 were Negroes. Therefore, a more than proportionate \$3,000 of the initial federal appropriation of \$15,000 was designated for the operation of the colored institute. The federal appropriation was to be increased by \$1,000 annually until the amount received by the state reached \$25,000. Accordingly, the institute was to be allocated a maximum of \$5,000 annually, thereby maintaining the initial ratio.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the state allowed those funds formerly allocated for normal instruction at Storer College to the institute. From the beginning, the West Virginia Colored Institute functioned primarily as a teacher training institution, although agricultural courses were offered. Of necessity, instruction was on the secondary level. By 1906, the normal department was overcrowded, additional dormitory space was needed to accommodate

<sup>3</sup> W. Va., *Acts of the Legislature*, 1872-73, 281-82.

<sup>4</sup> Charles M. Anthony, *A History of Education in West Virginia* (Huntington, West Virginia: Southern Printing and Publishing Company, 1911), 244-45.

<sup>5</sup> W. Va., *Constitution*, 1872, art. 12, sec. 11.

<sup>6</sup> W. Va., *Acts of the Legislature*, 1891, 171-73. See also B. S. Morgan and J. F. Cork, *History of Education in West Virginia* (Charleston, West Virginia: Moses W. Donnelly, Public Printer, 1920), 186-187.

female students, and the demand for teachers educated at the institute "exceeded by far the supply."

The development of the coal mining industry in southern West Virginia provided work for black laborers, and a concentration of Negroes began to develop in that part of the state during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. In 1895, with some assistance from the small but growing black population, the Republican party took control of the legislature for the first time since Reconstruction. That same year, the legislature voted to establish a second colored institute, to be located at Bluefield in Mercer County. Democratic Governor William MacCorkle refused to sign the bill, but neither did he veto it, and it became law without his signature. Intended as a teacher training institution, the government of the Bluefield Colored Institute was vested in a newly created five member board of regents, rather than with the normal school regents or with the board which governed the West Virginia Colored Institute.<sup>8</sup> The new school, without benefit of the federal funds available to the West Virginia Colored Institute, was not so well provided for as the latter. The state provided an initial appropriation of \$8,000 for the purchase of a site and construction of a school building, and in 1897, a frame structure was erected to house female students. Accommodations for male students were not completed until 1900. The particular need of the institute was for aids to instruction. In 1903, the Bluefield regents reported that "the Institute is practically destitute of physical apparatus and has very little of any other kind." As in the state normals, both a four year normal course and a three year academic course were offered, but it was necessary to extend the instruction downward to the elementary level. The demand for laborers to work in the coal mines of southern West Virginia retarded the progress of the institute, and it experienced "growth not so rapid as it ought to be, and attendance not so large as it should be."<sup>9</sup>

In July of 1909, the government of the colored institutes passed from their respective boards of regents to the newly organized State Board of Regents.<sup>10</sup> The institutes at this time were both of secondary grade, with a limited number of elementary students enrolled in each. The faculty and administration of both institutions

<sup>8</sup> W. Va., *Biennial Report of the Board of Regents of the West Virginia Colored Institute*, 1896, 2-11.

<sup>9</sup> W. Va., *Acts of the Legislature*, 1903, 75-77.

<sup>10</sup> W. Va., *Biennial Report of the Board of Regents of the Bluefield Colored Institute*, 1902, 2-4.

<sup>11</sup> W. Va., *Acts of the Legislature*, 1909, 402-04.

consisted entirely of Negro men and women. Emphasis was placed upon a curriculum which would be of immediate and practical use to black youth. The regents were familiar with the work of Virginia born Dr. Booker T. Washington and his plan for Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. In keeping with the tenor of the time, the regents enunciated "the attitude of the state" towards the two colored institutes as follows:

The State of West Virginia has always shown a disposition to give its colored population a square deal in educational advantages. The State Board of Regents, which represents the State in its relation to the higher education of the colored young men and women, are facing this duty squarely and sympathetically. Neglected and uneducated, the thousands of negroes in West Virginia would be a great burden, but encouraged and sensibly educated they are learning to stand alone and bear their share of their state's burdens. We must base our efforts to give the negroes higher education upon our plain duty and privilege to serve our fellow citizens, yet this education could be urged on the ground of economy alone, as the saving of the expense of crime and pauperism and the increased earning power of this large number means more to the state financially than the cost of these institutions.

The white man taught the Indian to use intoxicants. These intoxicants are harmful to the white man, but proved to be much more harmful to the Indian. A similar mistake was made when the white man gave the negro the white man's idea of higher education. While the white man could carry this classical education soberly, and find use for it in his unlimited opportunities for applying it, the negro became unsteady with his imaginary sudden elevation and found himself in possession of something which made him feel rich, but did not increase his ability to buy a home or provide "bread and butter" for his family.<sup>11</sup>

The small black population of West Virginia rendered the operation of the colored institutes to be relatively expensive on a per capita basis. For example, in 1913-14, the state appropriated \$218,770 to maintain the six state normal schools and "one college for white persons" and \$48,000 to maintain the two colored institutes, exclusive of federal funds provided to the land grant institutions. Thus, two schools which were operated for the benefit of 5.3 per cent of the population received 18 per cent of the total state appropriation for higher education.<sup>12</sup> This situation was in part a reflection of the dearth of public high schools for black youth, and was, in effect, a shifting of the burden of financing the secondary education of Negroes from the local to the state level. The emergence of the colored institutes as black colleges was

<sup>11</sup> W. Va., Report of the State Board of Regents, 1912, 76-77.

<sup>12</sup> U. S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, *A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States*, Bulletin, 1918, No. 28 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 402.

accompanied by another interesting situation. During 1933-34, the enrollment of blacks in public colleges in the seventeen Southern and Border states which maintained dual systems of education was twelve students per one thousand persons aged eighteen to twenty-one inclusive. The corresponding ratio for whites was sixty per one thousand. However, in West Virginia, the ratios were ninety-four per one thousand for Negroes and fifty-three per one thousand for whites. Of the seventeen states, only in West Virginia were there more Negro than white students enrolled in public institutions of higher education in proportion to the population group. Thus, generalizations made at the time regarding the extensiveness of opportunity for Negroes to secure a higher education in a publicly controlled institution did not apply to the State of West Virginia.<sup>13</sup>

Although the Negro population of West Virginia doubled between 1890 and 1910, no opportunity was provided for black students to secure a college education within the borders of the state until 1915. At that time, seventy-eight West Virginia Negroes were pursuing college courses outside the state at institutions such as the Ohio State University, the State University of Iowa, and the University of Michigan.<sup>14</sup> In January of 1915, Republican Governor Henry D. Hatfield told the legislature that the West Virginia Colored Institute "should be made so that the course would be such as would lead to a college degree" or "if this arrangement is not perfected, an appropriation equal to the per capita cost of a student at the University should be allowed, to be expended at the discretion of the Board of Control, to young colored men and women who are citizens of our state, and who seek a college education."<sup>15</sup> Rather than spend the taxpayer's money in other states, the legislature designated the school as the West Virginia Collegiate Institute and provided that the State Board of Regents might establish at the school "such college courses as might be expedient and possible."<sup>16</sup> Enrollments fell from a net attendance of 403 with thirty-four in the college department in 1916-17 to 322 and thirty-three respectively in 1917-18 as a consequence of the First World War. Nevertheless, the collegiate institute awarded its first baccalaureate degrees

<sup>13</sup> Dixon A. Wilkerson, *Segregated Institutions of Negro Education*, Advisory Committee on Education Staff Study No. 12 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), 2-26.

<sup>14</sup> W. Va., *Report of the State Board of Regents*, 1914, 41.

<sup>15</sup> W. Va., *Governor, Some Papers and Public Addresses of Henry D. Hatfield, 1913-17*, Governor's Address, January 8, 1915.

in May of 1919, at which time the college department was reported to be "on a good footing" with "a well trained dean and faculty."<sup>17</sup>

The development of public high schools for black youth and the continued growth of the state's Negro population gave impetus to the emergence of the West Virginia Collegiate Institute as a black college. Of particular significance, the collegiate institute was admitted to membership in the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in March of 1927, thus becoming the first Negro land grant college and the first of the West Virginia state colleges to be accredited by the appropriate regional association.<sup>18</sup> The West Virginia University had been admitted to membership in 1926, but was expelled as a consequence of its athletic policies and not readmitted until March of 1928; two private West Virginia colleges were members of the association, but the institute was for a short time the only regionally accredited public institution in the state.<sup>19</sup> Total enrollment for 1926-27 was 661, of which 381 were at the college level. The faculty of the institute held degrees from established institutions, including advanced degrees from Cornell, Columbia, Ohio State, Harvard, and Syracuse universities and first and advanced degrees from the Universities of Michigan, Kansas, Chicago, and Denver as well as Purdue, Bowdoin, Radcliffe, and the City College of New York. The 1928 *Survey of Negro Colleges and Universities* reported that "the scale of salaries of the teaching staff is above the average in negro institutions" and that "the institution has a first-rate academic organization" and a "well-trained teaching staff." It was recommended at that time that a graduate school of education be established "in the immediate future," and that plans be made for the development of graduate work "as a permanent part of the regular offerings" of the institute.<sup>20</sup>

In February of 1929, the state legislature changed the name of the collegiate institute to West Virginia State College. Coincidentally, the State Board of Education was authorized to establish at the school "such professional and graduate schools and college courses of

<sup>17</sup> W. Va., *Report of the State Board of Regents*, 1918, 33-34; W. Va., *Report of the State Board of Regents and the State Board of Education*, 1920, 34-36. The latter report covers the period of transition of the government of state institutions of higher education from the State Board of Regents to the State Board of Education.

<sup>18</sup> W. Va., *Report of the State Board of Education*, 1924, 31.  
<sup>19</sup> *Ballston College and West Virginia Wesleyan College* were members of the North Central Association; the first of the state colleges for whites only admitted to membership was Marshall in 1924.

<sup>20</sup> U. S., Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, *Survey of Negro Colleges and Universities*, Bulletin, 1928, No. 7 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1928), 406-07.

study as may be expedient and possible."<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, no action was taken to implement graduate education; rather, West Virginia blacks, prohibited from attending the graduate and professional schools of the state university, were encouraged to pursue their studies at "colleges and universities of their preference" in other states.<sup>22</sup> The tuition and matriculation fees for such students were paid for by the state. During the 1929-30 school year, the number of students attending West Virginia State reached 1,105, and only the West Virginia University, Marshall College, and Fairmont State reported a larger net attendance.<sup>23</sup> Students at the college, as represented by the 1932-33 freshman class, came from families with a relatively low income level. A majority were the sons and daughters of miners or other unskilled workers, and only 3 per cent came from the farm; about 27 per cent of their parents were professionals, but half of these were school teachers. From the point of view of both parents and students, the problems of securing an education at West Virginia State College were largely financial, even though the school was the least expensive of the regionally accredited colleges for Negroes.<sup>24</sup>

The Bluefield Colored Institute did not progress as rapidly in the direction of full collegiate status. Enrollments fell during the First World War from a net attendance of 223 in 1916-17 to 187 in 1917-18 but recovered to 235 for 1919-20.<sup>25</sup> Female matriculants consistently outnumbered their male counterparts by two to one. Preparatory work was continued, as was the two year normal certificate course for the preparation of elementary teachers, and the first two years of a regular college course were authorized by the State Board of Education in 1920. A third year of college work was added in 1927-28 and a fourth in 1928-29, at which time the college was authorized to award the B.S. degree in education and home economics.<sup>26</sup> The first degrees were awarded to eight graduates at the 1929 commencement, at which time forty-seven persons were graduated from the standard normal course. It was not intended that the institute be developed as a general purpose college. In 1931, the legislature changed the name to Bluefield State Teachers College,

<sup>21</sup> W. Va., *Acts of the Legislature*, 1929, 36-38.

<sup>22</sup> W. Va., *Report of the State Board of Education*, 1930, 46-47.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas E. Power, "The Socio-Economic Background of Freshmen at West Virginia State College," *Journal of Negro Education*, II, No. 1 (January 1933), 468-74.

<sup>25</sup> W. Va., *Report of the State Board of Education*, 1917-18, 34; W. Va., *Report of the State Board of Education and the State Board of Education*, 1920, 36.

<sup>26</sup> W. Va., *Report of the State Board of Education*, 1930, 79-81.

and "despite the great economic stress" which "had its effect on practically every angle touching the college," enrollments increased from 525 to 663 different students between 1928-29 and 1931-32, the number of registrants in the four-year course "increased very greatly," and President R. P. Simms boasted that "with the return to economic normalcy (sic) the effectiveness of the College will be in keeping with any standard teacher-training institution anywhere."<sup>27</sup> Both distinction and accreditation, however, eluded the school, and its future was by no means secure.

West Virginia State College experienced rather steady increases in enrollment during the depression decade, although appropriations and growth of the state's black population lagged behind. Significantly, West Virginia State was the only public college in the state which enjoyed a nationwide drawing power. President John W. Davis noted in 1938 that "the offerings of the college attract students from thirty states other than our own" carefully adding that "our student body, then, is cosmopolitan and national in character without harmful effects to our autonomous state."<sup>28</sup> Although authorized by statute, graduate study was never initiated. Rather, the state continued the policy of appropriating funds for Negro residents of West Virginia who desired to pursue advanced graduate and professional programs at colleges and universities in other states. Appropriations for this purpose increased from \$15,000 for the 1936-38 biennium to \$20,000 for the 1942-44 biennium, but a substantial proportion of these funds remained unspent, and fewer students, 124 as opposed to 145, availed themselves of the program during the latter period.<sup>29</sup> The Second World War brought shortages of materials, reduced appropriations, and declining enrollments. Involvement in the war effort taxed the resources of West Virginia State to the limit; a Senior Reserve Officers Training Corps unit was established in 1942, an Army Specialized Training Service unit was added in 1943, and the college participated in the Civilian Pilot Training Program and the Engineering, Science, and Management War Training Program of the U.S. Office of Education.<sup>30</sup>

Although its war efforts were relatively limited, Bluefield State College continued to experience difficulties. Legislative appropria-

<sup>27</sup> W. Va., *Ann. of the Legislature*, 1931, 21-22; W. Va., *Report of the State Board of Education*, 1930, 40; *Ibid.*, 1932, 113-15.

<sup>28</sup> W. Va., *Annual Report of the State Board of Education*, 1938, 123.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-32; *Ibid.*, 1940, 45. Only \$6,120 was expended in the 1942-44 biennium.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-47. See also John Clifford Hatcher, *History of West Virginia State College* (Charmers, Iowa: New C. Brown Book Company, 1962), 80-85.

tions were consistently inadequate, and as a consequence, faculty salaries remained well below the average for the state. The college remained unaccredited. Thus, its graduates were handicapped in transferring to other institutions of higher learning. The Negro Board of Education observed in 1944 that "lack of funds to attract competent teachers and to provide necessary library equipment and other facilities, account for the failure of the school to be admitted to classification by accrediting agencies."<sup>31</sup> Paradoxically, West Virginia State College was not only accredited, but enjoyed "the national reputation of being one of the two or three leading institutions among the seventeen Land-Grant Colleges for Negroes and, indeed, among all colleges for Negroes, public and private, that are not of University rank."<sup>32</sup> Finally, in 1947, Bluefield was recognized by the American Association of Teachers Colleges. Regional Accreditation by the North Central Association followed in 1951. After the war, substantial numbers of veterans came to West Virginia State and to Bluefield to avail themselves of benefits under the G.I. Bill of Rights. In 1946-47, Bluefield enrolled 157 veterans; West Virginia State enrolled 823 former servicemen the following year. However, as noted by President Davis, "because of inadequate equipment, personnel, and other facilities many of the veterans seemed disappointed with the educational approach which the institution was prepared to make their desires and needs."<sup>33</sup>

The Negro population of West Virginia numbered 117,754 in 1940. However, as a percentage of total state population, the black segment decreased by four-tenths of a percentage point to 6.2 per cent during the depression decade.<sup>34</sup> The Negro colleges continued to be relatively expensive to operate in terms of the percentage of the state's population served. During 1945-46, the expenditures of public institutions of higher learning totaled \$6,137,388, of which \$721,601 or 11.8 per cent of the total was expended by Bluefield and West Virginia state colleges. The greatest proportion of all money spent on higher education was for personal service. At this time the

<sup>31</sup> W. Va., *Annual Report of the State Board of Education*, 1944, 84. The Negro Board of Education was created in 1915 and abolished in 1946. The State Board of Education and the Negro Board of Education sat together as the "Joint Boards of Education" to consider the educational affairs of the two black colleges.

<sup>32</sup> George F. Nease, *History of Public Education in the State of West Virginia* (Charleston, West Virginia: Legislative Research Committee, 1947) 481. As of October 1943, Concord, Wheeling, West Liberty State, and West Virginia State Colleges were accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Fairmont State, Lincoln State, and Bluefield College were recognized by the American Association of Teachers Colleges. Concord, Wheeling and West Liberty were accredited by both associations. Bluefield State was not recognized by either.

<sup>33</sup> W. Va., *Annual Report of the State Board of Education*, 1946, 107.

<sup>34</sup> See Table 1.

salaries of all workers in the state system, including college presidents, ranged from \$1,200 to \$9,000. The highest salary paid to teachers and administrators excluding chief administrative officers was \$6,588 in the white institutions and \$4,020 in the Negro institutions; the highest salary paid to the president of a Negro state college was \$5,250. The relatively expensive graduate and professional programs of the West Virginia University, however, tended to inflate the salary average for the white institutions. The student-teacher ratio of eighteen to one at Bluefield State College and twenty-two to one at West Virginia State College compared favorably with ratios of twenty-nine to one at Fairmont State, twenty-four to one at Shepherd, twenty-two to one at Marshall, and fourteen to one at the West Virginia University.<sup>35</sup> Despite the decline in Negro population, the continuation of both colleges was considered to be a necessity, if for no other reason than to provide trade and vocational education for black youth. It was, after all, "much cheaper" to offer such training in the two colleges than to attempt to provide it locally in those school districts with small Negro populations.<sup>36</sup>

TABLE 1  
NEGRO AND TOTAL POPULATION  
OF WEST VIRGINIA, 1880-1970\*

Year	Negro Population	Percent Increase (Decrease)	Total Population	Percent Increase (Decrease)	Negro as Percent of Total
1880	25,886	-----	618,437	-----	4.2
1890	32,690	26.3	762,794	23.3	4.3
1900	43,449	32.9	958,800	25.7	4.5
1910	64,173	47.7	1,221,119	27.4	5.3
1920	86,345	34.6	1,463,701	19.9	5.9
1930	114,893	33.1	1,729,205	18.1	6.6
1940	117,754	2.5	1,901,974	10.0	6.2
1950	114,867	(2.5)	2,005,552	5.4	5.7
1960	89,378	(22.2)	1,860,421	(7.2)	4.8
1970	73,931	(18.4)	1,744,237	(6.2)	4.2

\* Figures on population within states by race are summarized for several census years in the *Historical Abstracts of the United States*. The data contained in this table have been extracted from the 1922, 1953, and 1971 editions.

<sup>35</sup> Harry W. Grimes, "Negro Higher and Professional Education in West Virginia," *Journal of Negro Education*, XV:2, No. 2 (Summer 1944) 304-23.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 307, 308-97.

Without publicity or fanfare, nine Negro students were during 1947-48 enrolled in graduate and professional courses at the West Virginia University. It was also about this time that two traditionally white private colleges in the state began accepting a few black students.<sup>37</sup> The state colleges and the undergraduate divisions of state university, however, continued to be closed to blacks until 1954, when in May of that year the Supreme Court of the United States in the case of *Brown vs. Board of Education* handed down a decision which required the desegregation of all public schools. West Virginia Attorney General John G. Fox quickly provided the opinion that the provision of the West Virginia Constitution which prohibited white and black persons from attending the same school was in conflict with the supreme law of the land, and was therefore of no force or effect. Fox further indicated that the desegregation mandate applied to state institutions of higher education as well as to the public schools. Shortly thereafter, the State Board of Education adopted a particularly important declaration of policy:

In conformity with the recent decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in the non-segregation cases, and in conformity with the subsequent written opinion of the Attorney General of West Virginia with respect to non-segregation in West Virginia institutions of higher learning, any qualified student may be admitted to any state college under the jurisdiction of the West Virginia Board of Education.<sup>38</sup>

Although the new policy was of considerable importance to the black citizens of West Virginia, it was perhaps even more significant for a large segment of the state's white population. Between 1950 and 1960, the Negro population of the state declined by 22.2 per cent, the overall decline in the state's population having been only 7.2 per cent during this period. Furthermore, the two state colleges maintained for the exclusive use by blacks were, immediately prior to the desegregation order, of service to approximately 5 per cent of the citizens of the state. Indeed, during the 1953-54 school year, fully one-half of the full-time students enrolled at West Virginia State College were from other states, and only about one-third of the in-state students were from Kanawha County. For the 1954-55 school year, however, 399 white students registered at West Virginia State! two years thereafter, white students numbered in excess of 1,000. The vast majority of the new students were from the Charleston area and Kanawha County. In 1956, President William J. L.

<sup>37</sup> *Cronin*, op. cit., 285.

<sup>38</sup> W. Va. State Board of Education, *Minutes*, June 8, 1954.

Wallace noted "the tremendous change in the local use of the facilities of the college" and observed that "West Virginia State College seems to be changing from an institution that secured most of its students from the entire State of West Virginia and many from outside of the State to an institution which is largely local."<sup>39</sup>

The influx of white students resulted not only in increased full-time attendance, but also in a burgeoning of part-time enrollment as whites who were previously prevented because of their race from attending the only public institution of higher learning in the local area enrolled at West Virginia State. The rapid integration of the college attracted national attention. In 1957, the *New York Times Magazine* in a lengthy feature article suggested reasons for the changes which had taken place:

State's two-year transformation reveals how the ugly sword of segregation can cut both ways, creating an ironic situation in which whites, pursuing ancestral racial taboos, actually end up discriminating against themselves. As a tax-supported college of high standards, State offered a number of advantages. It was conveniently located; Institute lies ten miles west of Charleston, W. Va., capital and commercial hub for the 241,000 residents of industrial Kanawha Valley. State's tuition—\$25 a semester—was a prime consideration in an area where many a youngster not only couldn't afford to go away to college but, living at home, had to find a part-time job to finance his education.<sup>40</sup>

It was further implied that the integration of the college was beneficial to the larger community:

It was inevitable that State's integration would have an impact outside campus limits. Slowly it is chipping away at discriminatory practices and mores in the communities of the Kanawha Valley. A local businessman encouraged his nephew, whose eight older brothers and sisters never could afford to attend college, to enroll at State. There the youth has become an outstanding student. Mrs. Mary Lou Ball, a 33-year-old mother who had known few Negroes personally before enrolling at State, now counts intimate friends among the race. "I would have completed my degree in education years ago if State had been open to whites," she says.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, the integration of West Virginia State College implied another, perhaps somewhat less laudable transformation. In 1955 the college dropped out of the Colored Intercollegiate Athletic Association and joined the West Virginia Intercollegiate Conference.<sup>42</sup> Two years thereafter, the land grant status and functions

<sup>39</sup> W. Va. *Annual Report of the State Board of Education*, 1956, 83.

<sup>40</sup> Harry W. Ernst and Andrew H. Calloway, "Reverse Integration," *New York Times*, January 6, 1957, Sec. 4, 25.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>42</sup> A college's football schedule is an indication of whether it has a national, regional, or local orientation. West Virginia State had customarily played schools such as Flak, Howard, Lincoln, Tuskegee, Wilberforce, Kentucky State, Morgan State, Tennessee State, and Virginia State. More recently the schedule has been dominated by West Virginia colleges.

of the college were transferred to the West Virginia University. This action was taken despite the recognition that "from an educational standpoint, the prestige of West Virginia State College would undoubtedly suffer somewhat from losing the land-grant function" and that "it would in essence become just another of the state colleges."<sup>43</sup> President Wallace in 1962 declared that the implication is clear that the service area of West Virginia State College is primarily the local geographical community" while suggesting "it is desirable that about 20 per cent of the full-time enrollment should be from out of state."<sup>44</sup> However, the proportion of white students at the college continued to increase so rapidly that by the 1965-66 school year, the total black student population both from within and without West Virginia constituted only about 20 per cent of the enrollment.<sup>45</sup>

**TABLE 2**  
**SOURCES OF FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT AT**  
**WEST VIRGINIA STATE COLLEGE, 1953-1961\***

Year	Kanawha County	Per- cent	Other West Virginia	Per- cent	Out of State	Per- cent	Total
1953	137	16.5	282	34.0	411	49.5	830
1954	258	30.0	258	30.0	343	40.0	859
1955	496	46.1	268	24.9	312	29.0	1,076
1956	761	59.2	263	20.5	261	20.3	1,285
1957	746	58.5	256	20.1	273	21.4	1,275
1958	926	61.2	285	18.8	303	20.0	1,514
1959	804	59.8	287	21.4	253	18.8	1,344
1960	742	60.1	268	21.7	225	18.2	1,235
1961	859	60.7	266	18.8	291	20.5	1,416

\* W. Va., *Biennial Report of the State Board of Education*, 1962, 112.

The transformation of West Virginia State College from a Negro land grant college of national reputation and drawing power into "just another" predominately white state college of decidedly local appeal was thus virtually complete.

Unlike West Virginia State College, Bluefield State College in Mercer County had enjoyed no special status. Additionally, most of its students came from the mining counties of southern West

<sup>43</sup> John E. Swenson, *Public Higher Education in West Virginia* (Charleston, West Virginia: Joint Committee on Government and Finance, 1954), 103.  
<sup>44</sup> W. Va., *Biennial Report of the State Board of Education*, 1962, 112.  
<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, op. cit., 112.

Virginia. For the 1951-52 school year, Mercer and four contiguous counties accounted for 4,222 of the 8,879 students enrolled in the Negro junior and senior high schools of the state, with industrial Kanawha County accounting for an additional 1,173 black students.<sup>46</sup> State Supervisor of Negro Schools C. E. Johnson at this time took note of the decreasing black school population, particularly in mining areas, since employment in that industry was declining:

The number of Negro schools and the enrollment in schools in some sections of the state has constantly decreased. This has been caused by population shifts due to economic reasons. Our school population has decreased to such an extent in some counties that a small one-room school provided for the few children in the county. The present biennium has seen the number of and size of schools reduced in several counties due to the closing down of the principal industry offering jobs to our people.

It seems that the number of Negroes engaged in mining and some other industries has decreased and is still decreasing materially in some areas. In some other industrial and semi-rural areas families had gone through the schools, the youth had left the community and there did not seem to be an influx of new families with children to increase the school population.<sup>47</sup>

The resultant decrease in potential black college students and declining demand for Negro teachers was hardly conducive to the growth of enrollment at Bluefield State College. Furthermore, Concord College, which was also located in Mercer County, had traditionally served the needs of the white citizens of southern West Virginia. The June 1954 desegregation order did not bring a massive inpouring of white students to Bluefield; of all the public institutions of higher education in West Virginia, only Bluefield State experienced a decrease in enrollment between 1950-51 and 1956-57, during which period attendance dropped 25 per cent from 453 to 339 students. In sharp contrast, enrollment at Concord increased 50 per cent from 831 in 1950-51 to 1,227 in 1956-57. By almost any measure, the operation of the college was inefficient and expensive. The percentage utilization of installed student stations and the ratio of students registered to the number of student stations available was the lowest of any state supported institution of higher learning. The per student appropriation of \$1,052 in 1956-57 contrasted with a per student appropriation of only \$458 at Concord and an average per student appropriation of \$642 for all state colleges, including the West Virginia University.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> W. Va. *Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Free Schools*, 1952, 75.  
<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.  
<sup>48</sup> *A Study of State Institutions of Higher Education in West Virginia* (Charleston, West Virginia: Subcommittee on Higher Education Study, 1957), 42. Enrollments referred to are squared full-time enrollments, i.e., full-time plus squared part-time enrollment.

The situation at Bluefield State was such that, in November 1962, the State Board of Education directed that a study be made of the feasibility of merging Bluefield and Concord into a single institution, or alternately, the possibility of converting the college into a two-year technical and vocational school. Although the college was in "the dubious position of having the highest per student cost and the lowest average teachers' salary among the colleges controlled by the West Virginia Board of Education" it was concluded that "neither the merger nor the two-year technical institute seems feasible." Rather, it was recommended that both the growing technologies program and baccalaureate degree programs in the arts, sciences, and education be continued. This course of action proved to be sound in that degree credit enrollment increased from 643 in 1962 to 1,116 in 1965, during which time the number of freshmen more than doubled from 196 to 417. The movement of white students to Bluefield had been initially very slow, but by 1962, 40 per cent of the students were white, with evening classes and technical students predominantly white. The 201 students in the college's dormitories, however, were all black, and 115 of them were from out-of-state. Most of the enrollment growth consisted of white students, so that by 1965, both Bluefield and West Virginia State had predominantly white enrollments.<sup>41</sup>

The transformation of the two colleges from predominantly Negro to predominantly white was unique. A decade after the *Brown* decision, only six traditionally Negro colleges had an enrollment that was less than 80 per cent black. Only at Bluefield and West Virginia State had the racial balance shifted from Negro to white, so that "in terms of enrollments" they were "actually no longer predominantly Negro institutions."<sup>42</sup> Even the historically Negro public colleges located outside of the Southern and Border states, namely Cheyney State in Pennsylvania and Central State in Ohio, remained predominantly black. The prospects for integrating additional public Negro colleges were considered to be poor. A contemporary study of Negro colleges suggested that, insofar as Bluefield and West Virginia State were concerned, most of the whites enrolled were "commuters who have no convenient or economical alternative" who commonly "return home again when their classes

<sup>41</sup> Earl W. Anderson, "A Study of Progress in Relating to Bluefield State College," mimeographed, February 1963, 1-2; Jack E. Robinson, *Higher Education in West Virginia* (Martinsburg, West Virginia: Committee on Higher Education, 1966) 18-20.

are even, having the student union and even the athletic teams in hands of the residential Negroes.<sup>120</sup> Nevertheless, West Virginia was the only state which had, in effect, dismantled its dual system of public higher education a decade prior to the imposition of strong federal pressure to do so.